

7/16/2018 Road Commission enters into agreement to grow county's wireless infrastructure

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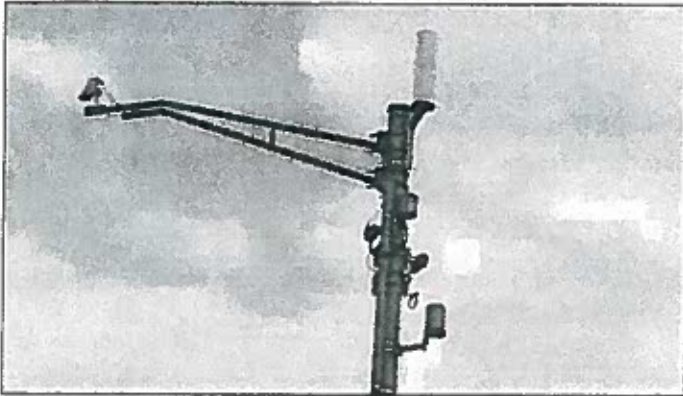


Photo provided by Craig Bryson

## Road Commission enters into agreement to grow county's wireless infrastructure

By: Brendan Losinski | Birmingham - Bloomfield Eagle | Published July 9, 2018

**BEVERLY HILLS** — The Road Commission for Oakland County has entered into a first-of-its-kind public/private partnership with Neo Network to install small cell wireless communication units on utility poles throughout the Road Commission's jurisdiction.

The Road Commission is leasing space on its utility poles for the wireless units to be installed onto. Small cells are low-powered cellular radio access nodes that usually have a range of 1-3 miles.

"We've been working with Neo Network, who is sort of a middleman entity with the cellular providers, and they approached us with ... this idea that solved a lot of problems for us and made our assets a lot more appealing to the cellular companies," said Craig Bryson, the senior manager of communications and public information for the Road Commission.

Neo Network is a private company that develops and markets the Road Commission's vertical infrastructure.

"We selected (the Road Commission) as a partner because of their commitment to innovation and their willingness to co-develop new programs," said Vince Aragona, the president of Neo Network. "I think everyone is starting to realize the value of wireless technology as a whole. There is a public safety benefit to having top-of-the-line wireless capabilities. ... The best place to put these small cell units is along roads like this because roads are where people use wireless the most, and it is putting them in areas already developed and not putting them in residential neighborhoods instead."

Road Commission officials said this arrangement allows infrastructure to grow without having taxpayers foot the bill.

"There's been a lot of debate in the state about how to help telecommunications companies place their hardware, especially as they move toward 5G and small cell technology," Bryson said. "The question is how do we incur costs and make sure we aren't costing taxpayers money to monitor and admit these services? This arrangement bundles our assets, and the cellular companies pay us a fair market rate to place these units."

Road Commission officials expect this deal to bring in an additional \$225,000-\$250,000 for the commission per year. Bryson said the revenue will be used to improve the organization's buildings and grounds.

The agreement allows telecom companies to pay for five- and 10-year leases. Neo Network is not yet revealing the identities of the wireless providers it will be working with.

"We have nondisclosure agreements about which carriers we will be working with," Aragona said. "We expect to be working with all four of the major national carriers, but for the time being, we have been asked to keep the details of their identities and location information private at this point."

The installations will be focused in southeast Oakland County.

"At the moment, we are looking at only southeast Oakland County, where the population density is largest," Bryson said. "It's focused around the Beverly Hills area, where our offices are. The first wave will be six locations, and that will grow to 250 locations over the next few months. We will consider expanding to additional areas after that."

Bryson said the Road Commission's revenue generated from the lease would cover any expenses if unforeseen problems should arise.

"The only way it could affect our operation is if this technology becomes obsolete and would need to be replaced, which is why we wanted to make sure we're getting enough revenue to monitor and remove the equipment if it ever became necessary," Bryson said. "There's no timeline for installation because this is all brand new and it's something new to deploy this type of arrangement. We're guessing the next six months to a year (for installation), but this is uncharted territory."

Bryson also said the installation process may include lane closures on roads and at intersections where the small cell units are being installed, but the closures should be brief and would not result in any full road closures.

Bryson and Aragona both stated that they believe this deal will be an improvement in service for Oakland County residents.

"We're hoping the public embraces this program," remarked Aragona. "We're welcoming other jurisdictions to see if they are interested in this kind of program or if they need help to grow their own wireless infrastructure. We're very excited to work with the (Road Commission)."